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# **Transnational Mobility and Cross-Border Family Life Cycles:**

## **A Century of Welsh-Italian Migration**

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### **Abstract**

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Italian immigrant settlement in Wales took the form of ‘chain’ and ‘clustered’ migration, based on village of origin-centered networks of extended family members. The original migrants reliance on transnationalist family support networks endured and evolved through descendant generations. Endogamous family formation and the progression of life cycle care exchanges served as key drivers of migration between Wales and Italy. Many families established catering businesses in Wales that relied on staff recruitment from kin in Italy. Migrants’ heritage and affective anchorage to Italy were maintained through ‘circular’ and ‘return’ migration premised on endogamy and shared language, which involved unimpeded border crossing except during World War II when many Welsh-Italians experienced alien internment. In recent decades, despite a decline in endogamous marriage, transnational family interaction has continued on the basis of the ease of European Union cross-border mobility. Changing modes and motives for cyclical and return migration encompass new forms of reproductive, professional and retirement migration.

Keywords: transnational mobility, Italian migration, family, marriage strategies, intergenerational care, oral history

## Introduction

Italian migration in Wales has been portrayed as a story of migratory success and integration (CHECK REF). This narrative is shared in the collective memory of the Italian community to the point that they often refer to themselves as ‘Italians in the rain’. Yet politically, Italian migration to Wales has transitioned from open passport-less immigration in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century to episodes of mass ‘alien’ detention or deportation during World War II, followed by normalized family reunion after the war and decades later the establishment of open borders during the 1990s to the present, pending Brexit negotiations. Furthermore, their transnational circular migration between Wales and Italy has taken place against a background of Welsh assertion of a subnational Celtic identity against the ‘otherness’ of the British state (Chezzi, 2015; 2014; Giudici 2013; 2014).

Studies on Italian migration to Wales have so far focused on historical and economic aspects of this migratory experience. Adopting an inter-generational and transnational approach, this article examines Welsh-Italian family networks and inter-generational solidarity as central drivers of transnational economic, social and cultural ties through political shifts and economic fluctuations in Wales.

Over time, return migration became structurally embedded in the family life cycle, notably at marriage and retirement stages. While the original migration flow was prompted by financial considerations, subsequent mobility between the Wales and Italy have been primarily motivated by family interaction.

To capture the transnational and inter-generational nature of this migration, this study, which we conducted between 2012 and 2014, adopted a mixed method, ethnography based, qualitative approach, including oral history, participant observation, and visual methods. Life history narratives were collected through in-depth interviews. Relational data on family

structures were gathered through the construction of family trees. Further contextual information was collected through participant observation at community meetings and events, while additional literature was researched in archives in Italy and Wales (ACLI Archives, Clerkenwell, London; Cardiff University Library).

The overall sample included families of Italian ancestry, predominantly from Emilia Region in Italy, in particular the Ceno Valley and Bardi. Three control families were from other parts of Italy (Udine, Cassino, Alba). Each family network encompassed three generations: G1 grandparents, G2 parents, and G3 grandchildren. The research was carried out in the main areas of Italian migration in Wales: the Rhondda Valley in South Wales, between Cardiff and Swansea (G1 and G2). Younger generations (G3) were found mainly in big cities: Cardiff, Swansea, and London. Due to the high mobility of transnational families between Italy and Wales, some of the interviews were carried out in the Emilia–Bardi area (Italy) during families’ summer seasonal migration.

Participant families and grandparents were accessed through initial contacts with associations and community organisations such as ACLI (Catholic Association for Italian Workers) in Clerkenwell; Italian-Welsh Association ‘Amici Val di Ceno Galles’; and the University of Cardiff. Successive recruitment took place through gatekeepers, which facilitated access within the migrant community. The families selected met the following criteria: grandparents of Italian birth, Italian mother tongue, resident in Wales, with descendent siblings (parents and children aged above 18).

The following section of this article provides historical background on the Bardi Italian-Welsh community and the making of transnationalist families through chain and cluster migration, followed by consideration of the forms and purposes of Welsh-Italians’ return migration to Italy during the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century shaped by endogamy and family life

cycle migration. The changing form of transnational migration in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century is discussed before concluding.

### **Bardi Transnational Migrants in South Wales**

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of migrants were drawn mainly from the valleys of the Emilia Romagna region of Italy to the Rhondda valleys in South Wales where the coal mining industry was expanding. Within the larger Italian migration to Wales, the most cohesive and visible group came from the mountainous area around Parma, called Valceno, and notably from the small settlement of Bardi.

Currently, the fourth and fifth generations descendants of the original Welsh-Italian migrants are UK nationals by birth, most with direct or ancestral ties to Bardi and the Ceno Valley (ONS, 2011). The Ceno valley is a mountainous area in the Italian Apennines between Parma and Piacenza. The municipality of Bardi is a small market town populated by approximately 2500 inhabitants, which doubles in size during the seasonal migration of returning migrants during the summer.

Migration to Wales started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, prompted by a boom in Welsh coal and iron mining, and reached its peak after the Second World War. The rural poverty of Bardi prompted a massive diasporic migration to the USA, Australia, France, Russia and the United Kingdom. The main area of settlement of the Bardi in the United Kingdom were the Rhondda valley in South Wales. Although there is evidence of Italians employed in shipping, mining and factory work (Chezzi, 2015), those from Bardi found their main means of economic livelihood through the establishment of bars, chip shops, ice-cream parlours and other catering businesses, creating what was popularly called a ‘café culture’ in Wales (Chezzi, 2015; Giudici, 2014; Hughes, 1991). These entrepreneurial activities expanded the local

service sector and transformed the ethnic composition of the valleys in a non-threatening way.

The time of the arrival of the Italians coincided with the spread of temperance religious movement in South Wales. The Italian bars, later on called ‘temperance bars’ offered a friendly, non-alcoholic alternative to pubs, and increasingly became popular as social meeting points as one interviewee recalls:

When Italians came over to the valleys here, mining was booming. So there was a niche market for cafés and eating places. Because ... the Welsh people weren’t doing catering. The Italians brought over their own help, as in their relatives or their friends, by word of mouth from their home village ... to better themselves because Bardi had no work. There was only low paid farm work. And they built up what they call ‘a community’, an Italian community here in South Wales.

The story goes that there was a pub on every corner and a chapel on every other corner. A lot of the immigrants to South Wales, then, were the people from West Wales, who were very rural and religious country people. No alcohol, no papers, no you know, very strict upbringing and.... those people were the Italians’ customers. They didn’t want to go to the pubs. So the Presbyterian Protestant teetotallers from West Wales mixed with the Catholic, wine-loving Italians.

*(RS, G1, Retired Managing Director).*

It eventually became a social event to go to the cafés. On Sundays, my father’s shop for instance was open. In those days, you did not open a shop on a Sunday. You went to chapel on Sunday, you went to church on Sunday. You did not go in an Italian café. Eventually it got accepted. And the miners would fill the shop on a Sunday. They

wouldn't stay in a cramped house with ten people. They wanted to go out for a bit of social life – on Sunday, which sometimes was the only day off. Now, on Monday my family had to go to court, because he paid a fine for opening on a Sunday. So every Monday, my father and his brother would go down to the court and pay ten shillings. Next Sunday they opened again. Next Monday they paid another ten shillings (laugh). And this went on for years until eventually the authorities thought 'this is bloody silly' you know? So they changed the law. (RB, G1, *Retired café owner*)

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Bardesans had experienced a relatively smooth integration with the Welsh (Giudici, 2015). However, tensions arose during the Italian Fascist period and WWII. When Mussolini declared war against Britain in 1940, the British government arrested and interned any male Italian migrant who had not taken British citizenship formally. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such formalities were uncommon so many men were interned. Some were sent to the Isle of Man and others to Canada. The Arandora Star passenger ship, carrying 470 Italian internees to Canada in 1940, had 53 from Wales. All lost their lives when the ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat (Carradice 2012). This episode was the most painful memory of Welsh Italian migration.

The war created many cross-border anomalies. Some families had members who had British passports joined the army, while relatives who had Italian passports were interned in the UK. One interviewee described the irony in which one of his uncles joined the British forces, while another was considered Fascist and interned on the Isle of Man; and yet another, lived in Italy and joined an anti-fascist movement.

Before the declaration of war between Italy and Britain, parents had viewed sending their children to their relatives in Italy for the summer as safe. A large cohort of Welsh-born children born of that generation faced a war-blocked border and were raised in Italy, only

able to rejoin their nuclear families as teenagers after the armistice. Anti-Italian incidents were experienced during and in the immediate aftermath of WWII:

My mother had a very difficult life because she lost her husband, she lost one of her daughters, and there were a lot of bad, bad feelings also towards the Italians at that time. You know they were called bad names. When the war ended she went back to open the shop. She found that the windows were smashed, the door was broken in... and ... obscene names were written on the building,.

(GC, G2, retired café owner)

Others interviewees remembered episodes of solidarity with the Welsh population:

There was never ever a problem with the Welsh community accepting the Italians coming, in the valleys, to open up the cafés, and to be part of the community. I can tell you a very small example. My father was interned in the Isle of Man. The local policeman was told, 'Go down to pick up Frank now'. He was ordered to bring him down to the police station, right? 'Cause Britain was at war with Italy. He knocked on my father's door. He was crying. And he was saying, 'Frank, I'm sorry, you got to come with me now. We got to go to interview down at the police station.' And that's the type of reaction the Welsh community had. (RS, G2, restaurant owner)

By contrast, the 1950s was a decade of prosperity and good business for the Italian cafes continuing until the late 60s when the economic profile of the valleys started changing.

The cafes were ... popular because they were meeting places ... they were like the life and soul of the community. At night [people] used to come down to *bracchi* cafés and have their drinks, their ice cream, their coffees, their tea, and meet their girlfriends as well. (RS, G2, Restaurant Owner)



The closure of the mines and higher mobility to the cities, led to a depopulation of the valleys and eroded the client base of the Italian cafes, many of which were sold. The Association Amici Valceno was established in 1975 with the aim of protecting the Welsh-Italian community's identity as the area became progressively more heterogeneous (Billington 2004; Chezzi, 2015; Hughes 1991; Sponza, 1998).

Very few are now working in the family business ... You'll find the old generation that had the fish and chip shop and restaurant that were handed down from grandfather to father to son, well, most of their sons don't work in the shops [anymore]. They go away to study, which is fine. They want to travel and be more involved in the modern world of technology. There's a lot more competition for younger people now than what existed 20-30 years ago. Then, there weren't so many clubs, pubs, discotheques or distractions. The Italian community, as a family, stayed together and attended [shared] social events. We all met together, and we all married Italians. I have two brothers who both married first generation Italians whom they met at Italian dances. Now it's all dispersed. (*RS, G2, restaurant owner*)

### **Transnational migration, Italian-style**

Transnational migration is predominately associated with an individual quest for political justice or political economic betterment, whereas efforts to secure family maintenance, care and formation are equally powerful driving factors behind transnational movement as illustrated by Welsh-Italians. Migration represents a fracture in inter-generational family relations and an uprooting from community belonging. Alongside the economic hardship of the settlement in a new country, migrants seek to socially mediate the affective shock of breaking away. Traditionally, Italian communities abroad navigated social and economic

stress by relying on the support of networks of extended family and peer villagers (Whyte, 1981). In the process, they reproduced the familiar safety system they had relied on in Italy. In this article, emphasis is placed on the significance of family networks in three forms of transnational migration: 'cluster migration' involving the creation of communities of people derived from the same geographical origin in Italy, 'chain migration' where first settlers 'pull in' further migrants from the homeland and 'circular migration' based on regular periodical returns to their homeland (Baldassar, 2010, Burrell, 2006; Colpi, 1991; Hughes, 2000; Fortier, 2000; Sponza, 1988; Whyte, 1943; Zontini, 2004).

***(a) Family social networks***

Italian ethnic communities, both in the motherland and abroad, are characterised by a strong emphasis on family culture, which is evidenced in the preference for spatial proximity of family members and strong inter-generational relationships between them fostered by frequent care and material exchanges. This is so much the case that the Italian welfare system has often been characterised as a 'familialistic' or 'kinship solidarity' model (Naldini, 2009; Saraceno 2005; Trifiletti, 1999).

Exchanges of family care-giving and interaction between adults, older parents and children tend to occur with greater frequency in Italy than in the northern European countries (Tomassini et. al, 2004). Strong inter-generational ties are manifest in high levels of co-residence and spatial proximity (Glaser and Tomassini, 2000). Higher normative values are placed on filial piety and family (Naldini, 2009; Lamura, 2008). In this context, women in mid-life are particularly likely to provide assistance in cases of the poor health or disability of parents, while grandparents normally provide extensive childcare services (Naldini, 2009; Saraceno 2005).

Italian migrants preserve inter-generational ties across nations, which reconfigure rather than disappear over time. Intergenerational contacts are fostered by different strategies and modes according to distance, time and place, with a higher incidence of technology and multimedia communication usage in younger generations (Baldassar, Zontini, CHECK DATES).

Welsh-Italian social and financial transfers arise from spatial proximity, co-residency and multi-generational participation in family businesses. Cross-border inter-generational care, especially for elderly parents, occurs frequently, particularly on the part of female carers (Zontini, 2004) and is facilitated by temporary generational co-habitation with the elderly and or children requiring care. At the same time, occupationally, cafés or shops, have provided economic subsistence to multiple generations of family members, both long-term or temporarily for several decades.

Studies of Italian communities within the UK (Chezzi 2015 CHECK AMPLIFY REFERENCES) observe Italian migrants and descendants identifying a high level of extended family contact family and inter-generational relations as the main marker of Italian ethnicity

Interviewee's question: Is there anything in you that you recognize as Italian?

Reply: I'd say the connection that we have with all our families in Wales ... the closeness of the family ...[and]... the fact that every year we come back here (to Bardi), and [seek to be] close to our grandparents. (G. B., G3, Teacher).

Inter-generational care drives transnational temporary and longer term mobility between Wales and Italy.

When my grandad was ill ... my mother would go over for a while to Bardi to look after my Dad's parents. (MT, G3, Engineer)

Behavior towards the elderly is completely different [from what happens generally amongst the Welsh]. When my mother got ill, we made the choice to take care of her, me, my brother and my father. For 18 months one of us was always taking care of her at her. I decided this because I appreciate the importance of what my Mum ... gave me and I felt I had to pay back the sacrifice she made for me for all these years. We were lucky from a financial point of view to be able to make this choice. (PS, G3, Business owner)

Furthermore, a family setting of inter-generational care and spatial proximity has sustained transmission of the Italian language and food culture. In turn, cultural heritage and shared values of mutual care are channeled through conviviality, language and food culture. Italian cuisine and family meals are among the most long-lasting ethnic practices, flourishing through the generations, even if families are now ethnically mixed and do not identify as being strictly Italian any longer.

Italian culture is quintessentially the 'family gathering around the table' to eat ... so if the family are scattered in Bardi, London, Wales or Scotland, it is more difficult to keep the family together, but family is always in their heart and in their head. (RS, G2, restaurant owner)

### ***(b) Chain and cluster migration***

The strength of this support system extends beyond the extended family to networks of descendant families of peer villagers that are inter-linked, often via inter-marriage. Over the years, inter-marriage expanded the network cohesion of the Bardi diaspora. The Valceno

Community has developed along similar patterns to Italian groups elsewhere (e.g., in the US, Australia). Initial settlers operate strategies of ‘chain’ and ‘cluster’ migration, ‘pulling in’ relatives and friends from the same geographic area in Italy, and hence reproducing abroad on the basis of community networks derived from a common area of origin (Burrell, 2006; Fortier, 2000; Sponza, 1988; Whyte, 1981).

Clustering among first and second-generation migrants can be partly explained by language fragmentation in Italy at the time of early migration flows to Britain. Italy was nationally unified relatively late, in 1866, and Italian, as a common ‘national’ language, was only widely adopted after World War II. Geographical and linguistic fragmentation meant that early immigrants spoke only local dialects that were very diversified. Lack of a common national language made peer villager groupings the most natural associational tie in migration.

Intertwined social networks and economic exchange were reinforced by the establishment of family businesses. As cafés required staff, employees were commonly recruited from the Ceno Valley amongst relatives and acquaintances. Equally, newly arrived migrants, typically sought work or lodging from Bardi migrants already settled in Wales.

My grandfathers knew each other. When my father moved to Wales my grandfather told him: ‘Make sure you go and see Luigi’ who was my mother’s father living in Caerphilly. So my father used to go and see Luigi in the shop, and met my mother that way. (GF, G3, Teacher)

Geographical similarities between the Ceno and the Rhondda valleys in Italy and Wales respectively, propelled the reproduction of homeland, peer villager and family dynamics. Bardi migrants emanated from a geographically delimited valley and migrated to another

delimited valley with similar geomorphic characteristics in Wales, where it was physically easy to keep community cohesion.

Given comparative proximity to Italy, a peculiar pattern of transnationalism with regular returns to one's ancestral village, were established. It may be more accurate to use the notion of trans-localism rather than transnationalism, given that the mobility occurred between two circumscribed areas within minority cultures.

South Wales is full of immigrants, a lot came from Hungary, Poland, Ireland, and Spain. They all lost their connection after one or two generations. They don't go back to their roots as the Italians do to Bardi. And I don't know why, other than maybe Bardi is just a nice place to visit. And because South Wales is a small area and Bardi is a small area, the families are close, there is a link keeping them together. A lot of the Italians in South Wales are related. When my father started a business he would call a cousin or an uncle, because of the strong family link. Because South Wales is in the middle of nowhere, and Bardi is in the middle of nowhere, there's a close link. (RS, G1, retired managing director)

Typically Italian communities abroad conserved practices that were current in Italy at the time of migration, which had already disappeared in the motherland (Burrell, 2006; Chiro, 2003; Colpi, 1991; Laroche, 1999; Medaglia, 2001; Sponza, 1988; Whyte, 1981). A higher attachment to retention of traditions and values such as community gatherings and religious observance is observed among Welsh-Italians. The clash between Welsh-Italian practices and modern life in Italy is inferred in the following interviewee's comments:

'We feel that the Italian community in Wales - I think you'll find that they are more Italian, especially today, more Italian in their customs, in their ways, maybe even more religious than the Italians in Italy. (LC, G2, Tour Operator)

I think we got stuck in a time loop. Our perception of Italy is dependent firstly on a town in Italy which is not exactly cutting edge (laugh) in terms of technology, in terms of music and so on. So we are a little bit ‘behind’, in ... our perception of what’s Italian culture. When we have an Italian dance we play waltz music ... ‘*quel mazzolin di fiori*’ (popular turn-of-century song) (laughs) ... Bardi is, geographically and culturally very insular. So are those Italian influences, common influences in my life, actually Italian or are they peculiar to Bardi? (RB, G2, Business Advisor)

Regular returns to the motherland test and refresh their Italian identity. The combination of interlinked family networks and trans-local mobility are crucial to the retention of ethnic identity. Their ethnic bonds have proved extraordinarily lasting over generations, in contrast to other ethnic migrant groups.

### ***(c) Circular migration***

In the early 1900s, it was not infrequent to spend long periods of time either in Italy or Wales, with siblings being born in different countries and with different nationalities. This situation became even more entrenched during WWII, when border-crossing of civilians between Wales and Italy was prohibited as previously mentioned.

Tracing Welsh-Italian family trees reveals not only family networks distributed radially across Italy and Wales but their linkage to kinship networks extended to other countries and continents, notably France, the United States and Canada. In other words, Welsh-Italians are part of a transnational diaspora. Keeping in contact with one another is greatly facilitated by meeting or indeed pilgrimages back to their homeland. Thus kinship patterns are generally dispersed but seasonally concentrated in Bardi. Their main anchorage is their homeland in Italy. Despite higher border restrictions during war, links between different communities of

Bardi migrants around the world continued. Communications were facilitated by their transcontinental networks. When postal services between the UK and Italy were interrupted, it was common practice for Welsh Italians to have their mail forwarded via Bardesan acquaintances in the US.

Relative proximity to Italy and an increasingly fluid and mobile intra-EU migration across borders was shaped by family life cycles. Unlike most long distance migration, intra-European migration is characterized by less visa restrictions, which encourages a higher mobility across borders and migrants' cyclical returns to the motherland. Cyclical returns are partly motivated by economic reasons related to businesses, houses and land owning in Italy. Transnational family relations are enlivened by work ties, inter-generational care, reproductive family matters and endogamous marriages.

#### ***(d) Endogamy***

Endogamy is a primary strategy for ensuring cohesion of ethnic diaspora, particularly prevalent among first and second-generation migrants. This is true for many migrant groups (Burrell, 2006; Campisi, 1948; Chiro, 2003; Colpi, 1991; Laroche, 1999; Medaglia, 2001; Sponza, 1988; Whyte, 1981). Endogamic marriage is an important initial driver of trans-border mobility. Welsh Italian cultural identity was retained and refreshed by endogamic inter-marriage between Italian-Welsh and Italian nationals. Over time, cross-border movement was integrated into the family life cycle and was a common occurrence in the Italian Welsh community.

Intermarriage was typically strong in first and second generation Welsh Italians. Three different patterns of intermarriage evolved among people from Bardi, the 'Bardigiani'. First, marriage among Italians in Wales was stimulated by the large concentration of Bardigiani



and their intensified exchanges across isolated valleys. Such encounters were fostered by active community life and 'Italian' ethnic events such as dances and social gatherings.

The founding of Italian associations, notably the Amici Valceno Association, was instrumental in encouraging dispersed interaction of Italians in southwest Britain through the creation of purposeful events, trips and gatherings amongst Italians. Events and dances organized by the association became tangentially dating and marriage opportunities.

Second, men living in Wales used to go on holiday to Italy and marry girls who return to Wales with them and start working in family cafes.

I found my husband when I was twenty-one. He came for holidays in Bardi, to visit his sister. After three years we got married. My husband was born here in Britain. His parents were from Italy. We had a café in Romney and I worked for thirty-four years there. (AM, G1, retired café owner)

Third, cross-country endogamy occurs with Bardesans from Wales marrying Bardesans residing in other communities outside Italy, particularly in Paris.

Endogamy sometimes led to deeply entwined relational connections. One interviewee (RS), coming from a family where three out of his four brothers married Bardi women met at dances, noted that at some point families became so entwined that he was both cousin and nephew to his aunt.

The Italian dances kept the culture together and kept us as an Italian community together. Unfortunately now there are too many distractions and there are less Italians marrying one another, fewer 'keeping it in the family', as they say. Once you have married a foreigner half of the culture is gone. (RS, G2, restaurant manager,

Porthcawl)

Predictably there was an initial stigma about marrying out, as this would ‘dilute’ ethnicity and weaken bonds with the original culture, particularly if an Italian man married a Welsh woman, given that women are normally perceived to be better at maintaining cultural ties.

If an Italian boy marries a Welsh girl, chances are that, slowly through the years, he’ll adapt to Welsh ways and that will become his social life ... Conversely, if the girl is Italian and marries a Welsh guy, quite often the Welsh guy will come into the business. That is the way these things happen. Usually it is the fellow who adapts to the girl’s ways. (RB, G1, *Retired café owner*)

At first you’ve got this strong coherence ‘*Noi siamo Italiani*’, but then you get leaks into society and it spreads, and the original thing, forget it, it doesn’t happen anymore. Language in the first generation was important. In the second and third, it doesn’t matter. We were all speaking two languages, you know. And the thing with people like us is that, in effect we have two cultures. So I can’t say I’m one hundred per cent Italian, because I’m not. I go back to Italy and get annoyed. The culture has changed, hasn’t it? It seems to be a different culture. (RB, G1, *Retired café owner*)

### **Continuing transnationalism**

Yet, Welsh-Italians’ traditional forms of temporary or permanent return migration have persisted. Inter-generational care for older family members residing in Italy still takes place. Such care is motivated by familial duty and is normally provided by women. Marriage migration happens less frequently. Although the older generation perceives ‘heritage

dilution', and the risk of ethnic extinction arising from the prevalence of 'mixed marriages' with people of Welsh origin, Bardi marriages still occasionally happen in the third to fifth generations with young migrants typically marrying Italian peers from Bardi whom they met during the summer holidays. Marrying in the castle of Bardi became trendy for Welsh Italians. Transnational dating still occurs among Welsh Italians in other countries as well.

I was born in Cardiff 44 years ago but my great grandparents on my father's side were from Bardi. My family have always come for the summer, every year. We have always kept a holiday home and spend 15-20 days here in Bardi. So I have made special friendships, with people here that I meet every year. So one summer, I met my husband, who is from Bardi, then we met again later... and in the end I just stayed here in Bardi.  
(MC, G3, business owner)

Descendants of Bardi migrants are now all UK passport holders. According to estimates of the Valceno association, there are approximately 3250 dual nationals holding Italian passports in Wales among whom, more than 2000 have direct or ancestral ties to Bardi and the Ceno Valley (ONS, 2011). The blurring of borders connected with the European Union's open entry migration policy for EU nationals and cheap airfares to Italy have contributed to a more fluid pattern of border crossings. While cycles of circular migration of the first and second generations of Welsh-Italians tended to be prolonged and driven by economic survival and relational ties, now new travel modes and motivations have given rise to more frequent border crossings associated with the seasonal rhythm of families' leisure holidays or the progression of the family life cycle, involving return migration for retirement from work. Both forms denote rising economic affluence and encompass a number of different purposeful forms of migration (Burrell, 2006; Colpi, 1991; Sponza, 1988; Zontini, 2004).

With improved economic conditions, remittances to Italy and ownership of second homes there, the focus of cross-border mobility has increasingly shifted to life cycle changes and leisure time pursuits rather than economic improvement *per se*.

A cultural shift in the post-war era led to the representation of Italy as an attractive travel destination. The location of Bardi, formerly problematic for employment, is now key to attracting Welsh-Italian visitors for holidays. It is a popular summer destination, because of its beauty and relative proximity to other Italian tourist sights, and return to their ancestral homeland.

Regular annual summer holiday returns tend to involve whole families, greatly encouraged by the establishment of events such as the annual ‘migrant festival’ (13<sup>th</sup> August). This festival attracts whole or select members of families of Bardi descendants from all over the world. Many come only for a few days or a couple weeks, whereas retired older migrants normally extend their visit over several months, particularly during the winter when the climate is warmer than that of Wales.

Rather than making temporary visits, some older Bardisans prefer to retire permanently to Italy and generally chose to resettle in their original ancestral village, taking advantage of the warmer climate and second homes that they may have inherited or already purchased

Younger generations use their Italian background as social capital, maintaining and reshaping the practices that they perceive relevant to their needs. Some capitalise on their language and social connections in Italy to establish import businesses of Italian products or to pursue other transnational professional careers.

Because of my Italian connections and culture, I have been able to go forward in business and I have been able to expand and diversify my business. So you know it’s a terrific, valuable bonus being ‘born of immigrants in another country’. It has worked well for me. (RS, G2, restaurant owner)

The younger generation enjoys returning to a place where they have some family roots and friends. The more recent use of electronic technology has an important role in fostering transnational links, and creating a shared virtual space.

My parents and grandparents always made sure I came back to Bardi, because if I didn't, the connection would stop. So if I keep returning to Bardi, and when I get married I will take my children there, and they will meet other Bardigiani and the other *emigranti*, and they'll keep everything going. I know all the Italian boys and girls around here (Bardi). We are all friends on Facebook now. Sometimes I give them a call from UK. We always speak Italian. Sometimes they visit Wales ... There are massive links between Bardi and Wales .... Lots of Welsh Italians like me have Italian passports, *cittadinanza*. I vote in Italy as well as in the UK. And everyone still comes back to Bardi, every summer. So we still keep Bardi close.

(G.F. G3, Teacher).

Owning a second home in Bardi, traditionally inherited from the previous generation is perceived as the strongest pull factor 'drawing' current generations of migrants back to their roots. Those families in the sample who did not own a house in Italy, or who lacked relevant family connections experienced less meaningful connections and more transient, 'touristic' visits to Bardi. The custom of going to the village in childhood is often stressed in second, third and fourth generation narratives as essential for creating a bond with one's ancestral homeland and Italian heritage.

Narratives and memories of the homeland transmitted by grandparents encourage visits by later generations of family members to return.

I keep coming back because I came here as a child I loved it as a child, I'd never forget that, you see? (...) So a combination of a lovely part of the world, generally nice weather, good holiday destination and you got a house and some roots, maybe if we came from Naples or Milan it would not be like this. (R.S. G1, Retired entrepreneur)

Mobility between the two countries sometimes translates as an attempt to reconcile the internal division in ethnic belonging, a feeling that migrants carry of being 'fake Italians' or 'not belonging anywhere'. While Italy or the memory of it is 'drawing' descendants of migrants back to their ancestral homeland, the experience of the 'actual' Italy may be problematic for some who have decided to retire there. They may choose to go back to the UK or to seek another retirement location.

One interviewee was unequivocal in his preference for Wales.

'I'll be honest with you. I was born in Italy but I received nothing from the country. I was there, I was unemployed, never had a penny. No work, no hope of work, no assistance of any kind. So, first chance I got I emigrated. My home is here ... I've got brothers and sisters, three of them but they've got their families, they live in different places from where we were born as well. When I go to Bardi, the places are abandoned because it's up in the mountains and the people moved to the towns, where there was work. There's just a few old people left. (MC, G1, retired employee)

Other interviewees, who had decided to retire to Italy, were ambivalent.

When I go back to Wales I feel the Italian community is much more friendly and close. Every year they organize different *festas*, trips and invite one another home for

dinners, birthdays, and get-togethers and see each other at church every Sunday. I see more of an old-fashioned kind of community spirit there than I have found in Italy.

It's a 'Catch 22', where you feel like you don't belong in any one country. This makes you a very open person, and you adapt very quickly to other countries and different people, but it also makes you feel like you don't have roots anywhere. There is always this feeling, yes, that your Italian side is drawing you back to Italy, and yet, when you are actually living there, you have the feeling, that Italians consider that you're not totally Italian. And when you are in England you are not totally British, so always this feeling of being neither one thing nor the other. I have spoken to other retired Welsh-Italians and they say they have the same feeling. (L. C., G2, Tour operator)

The ambiguity between attraction to Italy with its values of warmth, togetherness and conviviality and the more efficient, progressive lifestyle in the UK follows many into old age. As Attias-Donfut (CHECK REF) observed, the duality of belonging in two places is sometimes only resolved in the geographical choice of one's burial ground.

## **Conclusion**

This article has explored the changing nature of transnational families' border-crossing migration between Wales and Italy over five generations, which has encompassed the blurred borders of a pre-passport era, followed by brittle wartime borders and eventually the blurred borders of open entry conferred on citizens of European Union member states. Italian migration in Wales has often been seen as a prime example of successful integration. Paradoxically, it is one in which the Italian language and cultural identity were retained and refreshed by endogamic inter-marriage between Italian-Welsh United Kingdom nations and

Italian nationals. In this way, cross-border movement was integrated into the family life cycle and became central to the formation of Italian Welsh transnational families.

Cafes served, on the one hand, as a catalyst for ‘chain’ migration, by providing work for multi-generational household members, and, on the other, became an important channel for Italian cultural transfer to Wales. Their Italian café culture comprised businesses that ‘branded’ Italians as ‘non-threatening to the locals’ while contributing to local social service infrastructure (Hughes, 1991). Over time, the shrinking numbers of cafes in later years was perceived by older community members as a sign of ‘ethnic dilution’.

Circular migration is an attempt to reconcile the jarring experience of family fracturing in the wake of emigration. It maintains, reproduces and redefines relational ties within Wales and between Wales and Italy, alongside generational change. In an increasingly global society, labour migration and family-led forms of mobility can be better understood through an inter-generational approach situated within a larger transnational perspective.

This study illustrates how migration is often initiated by economic reasons, whereas subsequent transnational return migration is substantially motivated by choices arising from the evolution of family life cycles, family members’ care needs and an emotional sense of ethnic belonging rather than purely economic motives (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Zontini). Family is a powerful driver in moving people across borders and keeping ethnic links alive, when members are physically separated. Borders facilitated or constrained this process.

Welsh-Italian migrants entered UK before there was a formal passport system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, constituting a blurred border both literally and figuratively. In contrast a blocked border arose at the time during World War II when men without UK passports were declared detained or deported as aliens. Outside of these two border extremes, most of the time the borders were relatively unproblematic and travel costs were likely to be the main



consideration when Italian-Welsh family members wished to return to their ancestral village in Italy. With the coming of European Union open borders for EU citizens and rising economic affluence, transnationalist familyhood gained new meaning. Care-motivated trips continued, second home ownership enabled some to retire to Italy and whole families were returning for regular holiday visits.

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